

Excerpts From a Book I'll Never Write

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I'm three, and I'm confused, and I'm pretty sure North Carolina is a made-up state, like Arkan-soowah, or Nevada. They keep talking about moving South, after all, and everyone knows that 'South' is comprised of New Jersey, Texas, and Washington, DC.

I cling on to my grandmother as my uncles help load the moving truck that will carry us exactly 700.5 miles from New York to Charlotte and worry about whether or not they have pizza in such strange, mythical lands. They eat pasta, right? Raw mussels with lemon juice? Coffee with breakfast?

(I will learn that they do not, and I will also learn that you're not really supposed to give toddlers coffee.)

I will be pried, sobbing, from my Papa, and I will crave tricolore cookies that do not exist in places like North Carolina. I will be a product of two cultures, a foreign object in a Southern oyster. I will not become a pearl.

I'm four.

We're sitting in another apartment. I don't remember which one this is, if it's the one with the broken chimney or the one with the beautiful, shining lake that I discover years later was actually more of a drainage pond.

Let's say it's the latter.

Memories could use a bit of romance.

In a thick, Yankee accent, I practice the words I've learnt at preschool like it's a new language.

"Ma, what're you fixin' for din-errr?"

My mother laughs so hard she nearly drops the pasta, and calls every relative we have while I dig my toes into the ragged carpet and eat with the arrogant pride of a toddler that knows she's brilliant.

We laugh. We talk. We ignore the empty seats.

Another late night. Another grumbling stomach. Another cracked wall.

I'm five, and I'm wondering why I'm here, and why, if Heaven is so great, I can't be there.

It's only a few days later that I learn I have a new father, one who art not in Heaven.

I take it as a sign.

We're at a Fourth of July parade. I'm eight, nine, ten, and my dad doesn't let us wave the flag. We don't salute. We don't Thank God for Our Troops. The sizzling juice from our neighbor's hot dogs feels like a sin, and I ask again in vain why he hates the military. "We still have your service badge," I complain aimlessly, wriggling my red, white, and blue painted toenails through my old Nikes.

He tells me it's all brainwashing and violence. I don't ask again.

It takes three years, a wooden box, and two broken families for me to understand his hatred. It takes another year and an Iraqi refugee for me to share it.

"Okay, but will your real dad be there?"

The dust pricks my eyes like little bursts of sun, playing hidden amongst the pews. "I dunno. He's not, like... religious. But I think so?" The father frowns down at me, eyes kind and bemused, just barely missing the meaning of my words, like singing a hymn you haven't heard in a while.

"Mr. Costantini will be there, you mean?"

I'm twelve.

It's the first time I have to defend what family means to someone that thinks it begins and ends in blood.

I am a juxtaposition of assorted bones and tendons and joints jutting out at strange angles.

I don't see my mother in my hips, triangles of hard stone sticking out from my form like the handles of a bicycle. I don't see my aunts in the patterns of my ribs, each one standing proudly visible. I am fourteen, sixteen, too old to be taken seriously, the same size now as I was when I was twelve and landing with a sickening crunch on the floor mat, bones cracking where my ass should be.

(You know cheerleaders. If a girl falls in the middle of a stage and nobody's around to notice, can you still hear the retching in the bathroom stalls?)

My mother looks at my legs. "That's just not fair."

I think of the hunger in the pit of my belly. No, it's not.

I am a chorus of sins and the world is listening.

I'm fourteen when I have my first thoughts about a girl, when I can't help it. Which is fine. I've always been okay with.... that kind of thing.

Except it isn't fine. Except it's never been me that was One of Those, except it was never me that they talked about when they said girls can be hormonal. Every word I've said about God and love seems hollow in my throat as I stare at the ceiling, and against everything I believe in, I whisper a desperate prayer. Just in case.

I believe in God, but does He believe in me?

The water in Queens isn't anything like the kind you see in Florida.
I am seventeen, and the Woodstock bead I played with when I was two is now hanging from my neck.
Its previous owner is floating out to sea, ashes flecked against teal water like an oil spill. The sight chokes me, but there's no National Geographic photographer to capture that, no clamouring outrage on behalf of a teenage girl, no petitions to put an end to sudden strokes.
The tears come thick and fast, but understanding doesn't.
Years will pass, and I will still be waiting for my grandfather to burst, larger than life, from the surface of the waves.

Amazing Amy is touted as a villain, a liar, a detriment to feminism. She is the opposite of praxis, an example to be used and discarded.
She wears the blood of her attacker like a turtleneck, flicks it from her golden locks and allows herself a moment of triumph, and where the media sees murderer, I see survivor. I am eighteen, and the tears in my eyes are not for him.
Amy Dunne is not your Cool Girl, she is not your peaceful narrative of the silent victim, and she is not your shining star of a woman that has learnt her place.
If only the rest of us could have such revenge.

I am nineteen, and I am drowning in a city two sizes too small. I am a poor kid, a Yankee, a city dweller, a reluctant patriot, and my last name does not match that of my parents. I am a hungry cheerleader, a raging queer, a survivor and a sinner.
I am ashes adrift in a boundless ocean.
I am standing on a precipice, and all I have to do is fall.